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SUBJECT: POLISH VIEWS ON MARCH 16-17 GAERC

Classified By: Political Counselor Daniel Sainz for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Poland believes the EU will reach a general consensus on extending -- for another six months -- suspension of the EU's travel ban on Belarusian officials. Poland views as a positive initiative the Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister's March 6 visit to Warsaw to address Polish concerns about upcoming elections for leadership of the Union of Poles in Belarus (the NGO that represents the country's Polish minority). Poland will use the March 13 elections as a litmus test of Lukashenka's commitment to pursue other reforms. Poland has not yet decided whether Lukashenka should be invited to the May 7 Special Summit launching the Eastern Partnership, but feels the EU needs "courageous thinking" on its approach to Belarus. Poland will continue to press hard for increased EU engagement in Afghanistan at the Foreign Ministers dinner at the European Council meeting.

Poland shares U.S. views on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Sudan, Israeli-Palestinian Peace, Syria-Lebanon, and Iran. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) According to Polish MFA European Correspondent Cyryl Kozaczewski, Poland is focused primarily on the planned discussion of Belarus at the March 16-17 GAERC. Kozaczewski said Poland shares U.S. views on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Sudan, Israeli-Palestinian Peace, Syria-Lebanon, and Iran. Kozaczewski said France's renewed push for EU autonomous sanctions on Iran has met with stiff opposition from Spain and, to a lesser extent, Italy and Greece. Kozaczewski reported that trans-Atlantic relations had been added to the GAERC agenda, but said Poland had not yet received specific details or proposals from the Czech Presidency.

BELARUS

¶3. (C) Kozaczewski expressed optimism that member states would reach a general consensus -- before the GAERC -- to extend the EU's suspension of the travel ban for Belarusian officials. While there are still some problems, Poland sees sufficient improvement to justify extending the suspension for another six months. Kozaczewski confided that the Dutch have expressed opposition, but their reasons have not been made clear. He noted that Germany is leading the push for extending the suspension on the basis of Belarus' "satisfactory" progress on democratization. While Poland does not completely share the German assessment, Kozaczewski said the Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister's March 6 visit to Warsaw was a positive initiative. He explained that the Belarusian came to Warsaw on short notice to address Polish concerns about upcoming elections for leadership of the Union of Poles in Belarus -- the NGO that represents the country's Polish minority. Kozaczewski said Poland views the March 13 elections as a litmus test for Lukashenka's commitment to pursue further reforms.

¶4. (C) Kozaczewski said Poland has not yet decided whether Lukashenka should be invited to the May 7 Special Summit

launching the Eastern Partnership. While "conditionality is involved," Poland is currently leaning toward inviting Lukashenka. He pointed out that the EU had already clearly specified what conditions Belarus needs to meet in order to receive an invitation. That said, Kozaczewski argued, "we need courageous thinking" on how to deal with Lukashenka. If the EU does not at least consider extending an invitation, "we will lose the carrot altogether." By holding out the prospect of an invitation, the EU can "tie Lukashenka's hands" and prevent Belarusian recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia -- at least until May 7. "After that, we will have to find another carrot." He noted that Poland, Lithuania, and the Netherlands are consulting on a nonpaper, perhaps for distribution at the March 27-28 Gymnich meeting, on tactical approaches for dealing with Lukashenka.

¶15. (C) COMMENT: Kozaczewski presented a slightly more nuanced position than our interlocutors in the MFA's Eastern Policy Department, who continue to argue that Lukashenka should receive an invitation as long as there is no back-sliding in Belarus. END COMMENT.

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

¶16. (C) Kozaczewski said he had accompanied MFA Political Director Witold Sobkow on his visit to Athens in early March. The purpose of the visit was to ease Greek concerns that the Eastern Partnership would divert resources from the EU's efforts in the Black Sea region. Sobkow offered assurances that this would not be the case, pointing out that the two initiatives actually complement each other. (COMMENT / BIO NOTE: Kozaczewski said Sobkow's Greek interlocutors -- and

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Kozaczewski himself -- were "shocked" at Sobkow's "intimate" knowledge of Turkey's internal politics, especially since Sobkow has never served in Turkey.)

AFGHANISTAN

¶17. (C) Kozaczewski said Afghanistan had been removed from the GAERC agenda, and will now be the topic of the Foreign Ministers dinner at the European Council meeting. Poland will continue to press hard for increased EU engagement in Afghanistan.

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